

ga H O P E,

The Christian Mourner's Relief.

A
S E R M O N

Occasioned by the

D E A T H

O F T H E

Rev. Mr. *James Floyd*,

Who died *July 21 1759*, in the 55th
Year of his Age.

Preached at *Daventry*, *July 29*.

By *C. ASHWORTH*.

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Congregation.

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I T H E S. iv. 13.

——*I would not have you to be ignorant, Brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no Hope.*

DEATH is a mighty Conqueror. The King of Terrors is continually enlarging the Limits, and increasing the Subjects of his awful Empire. ^a *It is appointed unto all men once to dye, by him whose* ^b *Counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure;* and we see the Decree daily pass into Execution. Not affluent Circumstances; not the warmest Wishes of Friendship; not the most moving Eloquence of affectionate Relatives, who hang with tender Arms and bleeding Hearts about the departing Person; not established Health; nor what promises much

^a Heb. ix. 27. ^b Isaiah xlii. 10.

more than native Vigour, the strictest Temperance, and the most regular manner of Living, can secure the Continuance of Life to threescore Years and ten, the short Term that has long been esteemed the Age of Man. Death often, yea commonly, steps in long before that Period, breaks every Connexion, cuts off the active, the useful, the beloved, and carries them to the Grave.

Our Fathers, where are they? and the Prophets, do they live for ever? How many Persons of eminent worth, and whose Lives appeared of vast Importance, not only to their Families and Friends, but to the World, and to the Church of God, have been removed, within the Memory of most who now hear me? We knew them in Health and Vigour, studious and active; but we shall know them no more. They are in vain sought for in their Families, and amongst the Persons with whom they were most conversant and familiar; and we miss them in the House of God; their Seats are vacant in our religious Assemblies, and shall never be filled by them again. *Their days are past, their Purposes are broken off, even the Thoughts of their Hearts.* All Intercourse, all the Offices

^c Zech. i. 5.

^d Job. xvii. 11.

Offices of Friendship that have so long been exchanged with mutual Benefit and Delight, are interrupted. The Form which once we knew and beheld with Pleasure, is marr'd and withered, is become intolerable, is shut up in the Grave. ^e *This will be the End of all the Living*; and it is already the End of many of our once beloved Friends.

“Earth’s highest Station ends in, *here he lies.*”

YOUNG.

’Tis an awful Contemplation, and cannot fail to give us very painful Feelings. But have we no Prospect beyond?—Yes my Friends. Tho’ *Dust to Dust* is a melancholy Sound, which the Heart of Friendship knows not how to endure, there are Considerations that may render it tolerable, I had almost said harmonious. Tho’ the Grave is a horrible Pit, the Beams of the Gospel sooth, if they do not entirely dispel its Horrors. Were we Heathens indeed, unacquainted with the glorious Doctrines of Christianity, ’tis difficult to conceive from what Source we could derive sufficient Consolation. But, blessed be God! ^f *Life and Immortality are brought to light by Jesus Christ*. Our holy Religion opens a Prospect that may calm,
may

^e Eccl. vii. 2.

^f 2 Tim. i. 10.

may support, may reconcile our minds to such an Event. *I would not have you to be ignorant, Brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no Hope.*

The Christians at *Thessalonica*, to whom this Epistle was sent, were converted by the Apostle *Paul* himself. He came into these parts by a ^g divine Direction, and God gave him remarkable Success. ^h *The Gospel came among them, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much Assurance.* But Satan enraged to see his Kingdom falling, stirred up his Instruments to drive the Apostle from ⁱ hence, as they had before driven him from ^k *Philippi*; and God permitted it that his Zeal in his Service might be more quickened and invigorated. While he was among them, ^l *he exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of them, as a Father doth his Children.* ^m *He was gentle among them, and, even as a Nurse cherisheth her own Children, so being affectionately desirous of them, he was willing to have imparted to them, not the Gospel of God only, but also his own Soul, because they were dear to him.*

^g Acts xvi. 9, 10. ^h 1 Theff. i. 5. ⁱ Acts xvii. 1... 10.

^k Acts xvi. 12... 40. ^l Chap. ii. 11. ^m ver. 7. 8.

him. Now, as he had been forced from them abruptly, and in a Manner that would exceedingly affect them, he was the more thoughtful concerning them after his Departure, and his Heart yearns over them with the tenderest Sympathy. He gives Vent to his full Soul in this Epistle, and perhaps a Letter can hardly be mentioned, in which so many natural and beautiful Traces of a generous Affection are to be found. His principal Design in writing it, was to prevent their being moved either with Fear or Resentment, by the ill Treatment he had met with, while they were exposed to the like Persecution; to instruct them more fully in the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity, than his Time had allowed him to do while he continued amongst them; and to correct some Mistakes into which they had unhappily fallen. 'Tis probable some of their Number had died, either by ^a Violence, or in a natural Way, since the Apostle's Departure, and that the Survivors were in Danger of being ^o *swallowed up with over much Sorrow*, by Means of some wrong Apprehensions which they entertained concerning the State of the Dead. What the Mistake was is variously conjectured;

^a 1 Theff. ii. 14, 15.

^o 2 Cor. ii. 7.

ed; but, whatever it was, the Apostle insinuates that the Knowledge of what the Gospel discovers concerning them who sleep, ought to prevent their Mourning for their pious Friends in such a Manner as others did; Christianity affording very powerful Considerations to assuage immoderate Sorrow.

On this general Thought I purpose to insist and enlarge: in doing which I shall be the less disposed to take notice of the different Sentiments of Critics about the particular Notion referred to in the Text, as it would lead us off from the general Subject, which I am persuaded, you see is of itself sufficiently important to engage our whole Attention; and that if *we are not ignorant concerning them who sleep, we have no need to sorrow, as others that have no Hope.*—No Tears, which the Christian Hope can restrain, should drop on the present Occasion. In our farther Meditations upon these Words it may be proper for us,

First, to consider the State in which the Apostle represents the pious Dead;

Secondly, the Admonition he gives his Friends in Regard to them; and

Thirdly,

Thirdly, the End he had in View in giving them this Admonition.

First, let us consider the State in which the Apostle represents the pious Dead. He speaks of them as *asleep*: a Phrase which the sacred Writers often use, when they speak of the Death of good Men.

Such Expressions as this, have led some to conjecture, and even to contend, that in the Interval between Death and the Resurrection, the whole Man is totally deprived of Perception and Thought; incapable of Action, or Enjoyment. But the Argument drawn from this, and the like Expressions, is evidently founded on a Supposition, that Death resembles Sleep in more Respects than are necessary to vindicate the Use of this Term, according to a borrowed and figurative Signification. The Death of good Men must, in some View, resemble Sleep, or the Metaphor had been intirely improper; but it is not necessary to suppose that it holds in every View. Figurative Expressions in any Writings, are to be explained by those where no Figure is used; and it were absurd to understand a Metaphor in such a Sense, as is inconsistent with the evident Import of other

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Expressions

Expressions that are plain and literal. Now, should we understand the Phrase in the Text, "*them which are asleep,*" as an Intimation that they are intirely insensible and inactive, it would contradict those passages in which the Apostle expresses his ^p *Desire to depart and to be with Christ,* ^q *to be absent from the Body and present with the Lord,* in such a Manner as it seems almost impossible for him to have done, had he not been perswaded he should then be capable of Perception and Action; had he not expected to be employed in nobler Services, and to enjoy more exalted Happiness, than what he could perform or enjoy at present. Though the Scripture therefore speaks of good Men, who have left our World as asleep, I am perswaded it intends not to convey an Idea of the Cessation or Suspension of the Soul's Existence, and says many Things inconsistent with such a Notion.

The Term seems to be chosen to give us a familiar Representation, a soothing and agreeable Idea of Death: to intimate that, to a good Man, it is a Change at which he need not be more alarmed, than at falling asleep.

It

^p Phil. i. 23.

^q 2 Cor. v. 8.

It refers, no doubt, in some Measure to the Inactivity of the Body. A deep Sleep has fallen upon it, that suspends all Kind of Action, and renders it for a While quite insensible. There is a considerable Resemblance between the Aspect and Appearance of the dead Body of a departed Friend, and the State of a Person asleep, who appears, however his Mind is employed, to have no Perception, Thought, or active Power.

Perhaps it may refer to their being withdrawn from mortal affairs. Persons asleep are, for the Time, separated from the rest of the World, and have no Concern in what is doing about them. Thus *the Living know that they must die, * but the Dead know not any Thing : also their Love, and their Hatred, and their Envy is now perished, neither have they any more a Portion in any Thing that is done under † the Sun. His Sons come to Honour,*

B 2

nour,

† Ecclef. ix. 5, 6.

* A lively Infination, that Death is so much more certain than almost every other Event, that it is the only Thing of which we can be confident. *The Living know that they must die ; q. d. this at least they know ; though most other Things, which they think they know, are only Conjectures, and may be Mistakes.*

† Job xiv. 21.

nour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, and he perceiveth it not of them.

But if the Expression intended nothing more than such Circumstances as these, there would have been no peculiar Propriety in applying it to the Death of good Men, of whom it is here used, and to whom it is chiefly confined. It seems further to suggest the intire Tranquility of that State, into which they are entered; that they are free from Anxiety and Labour; are delivered from every Cause and Occasion of Disquietude. ^t *The Wicked cease from troubling, and the Weary are at rest.* ^u *They are taken from the Evil to come, they enter into Peace, they shall rest on their Beds.* Thus it may lead our Thoughts to an important, though only a negative Branch of their Happiness, their Escape and Exemption from every Thing tormenting, and grievous.

But probably, this Expression was principally designed to suggest, the speedy Redemption of the Body from the Grave; when even that Part of the Man which has been inactive, shall be awakened into Vigor. We lay us down to sleep without Emotion

or

^t Job iii. 17.

^u Ifaiah lvii. 1, 2.

or uneasy Apprehension, because we find by Experience, that in a little while we awake again to the Use of all our corporeal and mental Powers. ^w *And they too who sleep in the Dust of the Earth shall awake.* When *Lazarus* died, our Lord spake of his Condition, under the Notion of Sleep; an Image which was the more apposite as he intended so soon to raise him. ^x *Our Friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of Sleep.* Now, by the same kind of Figure, the Expression may be applied to good Men in general; inasmuch as the interval their Bodies sleep in the Grave, bears much less Proportion to the ages of Activity and Happiness, which shall succeed it, than the four Days he lay among the Dead, yea, than a single Night, to the longest Period of human Life. ^y *Man, even the good Man, lieth down and rises not, till the Heavens be no more; till then, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their Sleep.* What is this to Eternity! but as a Drop of Water to the Ocean.

This is the State in which the Apostle represents the pious *Dead; as fallen asleep.* An Expression which may naturally suggest
to

^w Dan. xii. 2.

^x John xi. 11.

^y Job xiv. 12.

to us an Observation which Experience, and other Passages of Scripture confirm, that they as far as respects their Bodies, are insensible, and inactive ;—are wholly retired from the present Scenes, and unconcerned in all its Transactions ;—are in a State of perfect Tranquility, unruffled with Afflictions, and Exercises of every kind ; and shall e're long awake from this Insensibility so far as it prevails to a new and more durable Existence. But this last Thought will claim our further Attention, when we proceed.

Secondly, to consider the Admonition which the Apostle gives them, with respect to the Persons who were in this State of sleep.

There were some Things concerning those who sleep, of which he would not have them to be ignorant. The *Thessalonians*, as we have already observed, were bereaved of their spiritual Father, before they were fully instructed in the Christian Doctrine : 'Tis possible therefore, they had never heard him discourse on some of the Topics which were now in the Apostle's Mind ; and if they had, since Sorrow, especially in its first Transports, is apt to distract and over-power the thinking Faculties,

Faculties, it was expedient to repeat them. In Imitation of our Apostle, the Friends of Mourners still endeavour to administer Consolation, by recalling to their Memories Truths, with which they are already acquainted. What St. *Paul* chiefly intended, and which the *Thessalonians* were yet ignorant of, or in Danger of not recollecting, we may learn from the Context, and they are very proper Articles for our present most serious Consideration.

1. He reminds them that they of whom he speaks, * *slept in Jesus*; and I am persuaded that the Expression is designed to give us a comfortable Apprehension concerning the State of good Men in general after Death, and not merely concerning such Persons who had suffered Martyrdom. 'Tis proper Language to be used concerning true Christians in general. *They sleep in Jesus*. They dye at the Command of Christ, and are laid to sleep under his Patronage and Protection. He, who best knows the Interests of his People, and has demonstrated his regard to them by dying for them, ² *Has the Keys of Death and the invisible World*.—They committed their immortal Spirits to his Care by
a living

* Ver. 14.

² Rev. i. 18.

a living Faith; by this Faith they were united to him, and on account of this Union, are often spoken of as being ^a *in Christ*; in him as Branches in the Vine, as Members in the Body. Now as they died in this State, they remain in him even after Death; united to him by Bonds, which Death cannot dissolve. ^b *Blessed are the Dead which dye in the Lord!*

2. He expressly asserts the Resurrection of their mortal Part. ^c *The Dead in Christ shall rise first*, i. e. before the glorious Change that shall pass on the Saints who shall then be found alive. Some of the new Converts at *Thessalonica* were dead. Their Bodies the only Part which had been visible to any Eye of Flesh, were, according to the well-known Laws of Nature dissolved, and had been deposited out of Sight. There seemed to be an utter and final End of them. But the Apostle leads on their Thoughts to the Time when Christ, the great Lord of Life, will rescue from the Hands of Death, even those Trophies of his Victory, and restore them in a Form worthy his own Power and Magnificence, and suited to the Rank in which he intends they should act and appear. This is indeed

^a Rom. viii. 1. ^b Rev. xiv. 13. ^c Ver. 16.

indeed a peculiar Discovery of the Gospel; and it is strongly asserted there. Nevertheless, some Intimations of it are to be found in the Old Testament; and 'tis probable that *Martha* had learnt from thence, to speak with such confident Expectation of it, in her Discourse with our blessed Lord on the occasion of her Brother's Resurrection, ^d *I know that he shall rise again in the Resurrection of the last Day*: The New Testament however abounds with Declarations of it. Nothing can be more express than that of our Lord; ^e *The Hour is coming in the which all that are in their Graves shall hear the Voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the Resurrection of Life; and they that have done evil, to the Resurrection of Damnation*. This Event is undoubtedly intended by St. Paul, when he says, ^f *If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the Dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the Dead, shall also quicken your mortal Bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you*: And in that other Passage, where speaking of himself and his Friends, as looking for the second Coming of Christ, he adds, ^g *who shall change our vile Body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious Body*. The greatest Part of the fifteenth Chapter of

^d John xi. 24. ^e John v. 28, 29. ^f Rom. viii. 11. ^g Phil. iii. 21.

the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, is taken up in asserting and illustrating this glorious Display of divine Power, and in explaining the Nature and Manner of it: And the Passages in other Parts of the New Testament in which it is plainly asserted, or evidently implied, are almost innumerable. It is indeed hard for our dull and limited Faculties to conceive how it will be accomplished; and Sense, and Wit, and Reason, are all ready to furnish Objections, but it is an indubitable Doctrine of our holy Religion, and so interwoven with its Fabrick that it cannot be taken away without destroying the whole Constitution.

And as it is plainly a Doctrine of Scripture, we may collect from the frequent mention made of it in the ^b Preachings and Writings of the Apostles, that it appeared to them (as it truly is) of the last Importance. We are unwilling that any Part of ourselves, or our Friends, should be entirely lost, or annihilated: And whatever Notions we may entertain of the Superiority of the Soul, and in whatever philosophical Strains we may speak of this Clay as an Incumbrance, and a Prison to the Mind, our Bodies are a Part
of

^b Act. iv. 2. xvii. 18. xxiv. 15, 21.

of ourselves, and we cannot forbear to have some Affection for them. ⁱ *Never any Man hated his own Flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it.* It brings a Chill into our Blood, when we seriously think of the Change that Death will make in our Bodies; and were they never to be recovered, the Thought would be almost insupportable. ^k *We shall not be able to say to Corruption, "thou art my Father;" and to the Worm, "thou art my Mother and my Sister," with an easy and cheerful Heart, unless we can add in the sublime Language of Faith, " ^l I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter Day upon the Earth; and though after my Skin, Worms destroy this Body, yet in my Flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine Eyes shall behold, and not another."*

But the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body is of a peculiar Importance, as it involves in it the strongest Proof, that the Soul shall be more especially regarded. Doth God, my Friends, watch over that in us which is common to Brutes, and not suffer it to perish? and will he neglect that which is the peculiar Distinction and Excellence of our

ⁱ Eph. v. 29. ^k Job xvii. 14. ^l Job xix. 25, &c.

Nature ? Does the Lord Jesus Christ keep a faithful and perpetual Eye over the Dust of his People to preserve it ; and will he one Day raise, refine and exalt it ?—Will he gather these scattered Particles, form them into a glorious Body, and provide suitably for its everlasting Enjoyment ; and shall not the Spirit, which is inconceivably more noble, which is allied to Angels, which is the Image of himself, and a kind of Emanation from him, engage his superior Care ?—Will he not even in the intermediate State, * but especially after its Re-union to the Body, when

* As it is the most supporting and comfortable Reflexion that our Friends enter on a State of Happiness immediately after Death, it may seem strange, that the Apostle did not expressly alledge this Consideration ; and perhaps some may apprehend his giving no Hint of it in all this Context, where it would seem so apposite and important, a Presumption that he paid no regard to it. But such a Presumption can be of no Weight against the express Sense of those two Passages above referred to, (2 Cor. v. 8. *Phil.* i. 23.) and several other Scriptures. *Monf. Saurin* conjectures that the *Thessalonians* expected Christ would soon appear to Judgment ; and that their Distress for their Brethren, who were dead, only arose from an Apprehension that they would lose the Joy of being present at this Scene, (vid. *Doddridge* on the Place). If this was really their mistaken Apprehension, it had been little to the Purpose to suggest that they were already in a State of Happiness, and it must be owned, the Apostle's Observations contain a sufficient Answer to such an Objection ; as the principal

when the final Sentence shall be passed, provide for it a nobler and more exalted Mansion than this animal Body is capable of affording? Undoubtedly he will; and we might infer this merely from the Resurrection of the Body, by a natural and irresistible Conclusion.

3. He further informs them, that all true Christians shall be assembled to meet Christ. The Dead shall be raised and transformed, and all who are found living shall pass thro' a correspondent Change for this Purpose.

** The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with the Voice of the Arch-angel, and with the Trump of God; and the Dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up, together with them,*

Principal Thought he insists upon is, that, in Respect to the Honour and Happiness of seeing Christ, those who were dead would be put on a Level with those who should be found alive. But it deserves to be remarked, that, whatever the Mistake was, the Apostle in this, as in many other Instances, speaks to a particular Case in such general Terms, that what he says may be applied to a Variety of other Cases. An Observation which will assist us in discovering the true Sense and Beauty of many Passages in his Writings; and will, 'tis presumed, justify the general Manners in which the Text is treated in this Discourse, even on a Supposition that Mons. Saurin's Conjecture is right.

* Ver. 16, 17.

them, in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air. This will undoubtedly be a more glorious Scene, than was ever beheld on our Earth, from the Creation to the Consummation of all Things. When all the Redeemed of the Lord from among the Children of Men; the Thousands, the Millions; yea, ^a *a Multitude which no Man can number from all Nations, and Kindred, and People, and Tongues*; having obtained the ^b *Redemption of their Bodies,* ^c *(that which was sown in Corruption being raised in Incorruption, that which was sown in Dishonour, being raised in Glory, that which was sown a natural Body, being raised a spiritual Body,)* shall be united to their Saviour in one august Assembly, be acquitted, approved, and honoured by him, and attend his triumphant Entrance into his heavenly Kingdom.

4. He assures them, that this Solemnity shall introduce them to an eternal Abode with Christ. ^d *And so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

The Happiness of Heaven is often represented, as seeing God, or dwelling in the Presence of Christ. Thus our Lord prayed,
Father,

^a Rev. xii. 9.

^b Rom. viii. 23.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 42. . . 44.

^d Ver. 17.

^a *Father I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am ; that they may behold my Glory which thou hast given me.* This was the View in which St. Paul considered it, and longed so earnestly for it, ^b *we are willing rather to be absent from the Body, and present with the Lord: I am in a* ^c *Streight between two, having a Desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.* And thus St. John describes the Inhabitants of Heaven ; ^d *his Servants serve him, and they shall see his Face.* The Expression intimates that the Joy of the Blessed, will in Part arise from beholding the Exaltation of their divine Master ; and that they shall be favoured with an Opportunity of carrying on the most endeared Converse with him, and enjoying the Tokens of his Approbation and Complacence.

And thus they shall spend a blisful Eternity. We shall be *ever* with the Lord. Delightful Thought ! ^e *Truly our Fellowship,* saith the Apostle John, *is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* There are Seasons when Christians, even in these latter

^a John xvii. 24.^b 2 Cor. v. 8.^c Phil. i. 23.^d Rev. xxii. 3, 4.^e 1 John i. 3.

ter Ages, can say the same ; and then is it, if ever in this World, ^a *that their Joy is full.*

Experience indeed proves that this Joy is too seldom experienced, and does not often arise so high or endure so long as might be desired. But, as their Converse shall be more intimate and endearing, so likewise more constant: yea, it shall be without Interruption and without End: *we shall ever be with the Lord.*

5. He reminds them, that this Happiness is connected with the Death and Resurrection of Christ. ^b *If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.*

The Apostle in these Words may be understood to assert, that the Foundation of this Hope, is laid in the Death and Resurrection of Christ ; that we owe it to his mediatorial Undertaking, to his Obedience and the Merits of his Death. A Thought which we should ever remember and cherish, to inspire our Hearts with all the Ardour of Gratitude and Love. ^c *He was delivered for our Offences, and raised again for our Justification.*

He

^a 1 John i. 4.

^b Ver. 14.

^c Rom. iv. 25.

He might likewise intend to intimate the Security of this great Blessing ; that it is as certain that the pious Dead shall be raised, as that Christ is already risen ; so that we may look on his Resurrection as the Pledge of our own. And undoubtedly, this was one Reason of his taking a glorified Body into the Presence of God. ** If Christ be preached that he arose from the Dead, how say some that there is no Resurrection of the Dead ? for if there be no Resurrection of the Dead, then is not Christ risen : but now is Christ risen, and is become the first Fruits of them that slept.*

And he might further design by this Expression, to give them a high Apprehension of this Privilege, and of the glorious Life to which they should be raised. It was the Purchase of the Saviour's Death ; the important End which his Sufferings were intended to secure. A Happiness for which the Son of God did not hesitate to lay down his Life.

These are the principal Subjects which the Apostle calls to the Remembrance of his mourning Friends, in the Verses following the Text ; these are the glorious Discoveries

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of

* 1 Cor. xv. 12, 13, 20.

of which he was desirous *that they might not be ignorant*. Let us now consider,

Thirdly, the End he had in View in giving them these consolatory Hints and Instructions. I would not have you ignorant concerning them which sleep, *that ye sorrow not even as others which have no Hope*.

^a The Church at *Thessalonica*, chiefly consisted of converted *Heathens*: and it is most probable, the Bulk of the Inhabitants of this City, might yet remain unconverted. Now *others who had no Hope*, seem to have been Persons who yet continued in all the Ignorance, and involved in all the Gloom and Darkness of Gentile Superstitions.

The Heathens had indeed their Fables or Traditions concerning a future State. But such Multitudes totally denied the Doctrine and some of them Men of Learning and sober Reflection; the Arguments by which others attempted to establish it were so weak, and inconclusive, and, in general, as to those who believed it, their Notions concerning its Nature, were so visionary and confused, so ridiculous or romantic, that they could suggest
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^a Acts xvii. 4. 1 Theff. ii. 14.

small Hope or Consolation, on the Departure of the most valuable and beloved Friends. The Apostle seems to have had these Errors and Delusions in his full View, when he speaks of Heathens elsewhere, as he does in our Text, as Persons ^a *without Hope*.

With Regard to their Friends who were dead, their Bodies were evidently mouldering in the Grave, and they seemed to have no Apprehension that they would ever be restored: and concerning their Souls, their best Conjectures were groundless and childish Fictions.

Now this would naturally add a peculiar Weight to their Sorrow.

To have our Friends removed from us, and not to know what is become of them, whether they are not utterly destroyed and annihilated, must fill the Mind with the utmost Perplexity and Solitude: and the Despair of attaining Satisfaction by any possible Enquiries, must add the Uneasiness of Fear and Terror to the actual Pain of Separation.

There is nothing in this Case to restrain the *Sallies* of Passion, nor would it seem strange if the Death of a Friend, in such

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Circum-

^a Eph. ii. 12.

Circumstances, should embitter every remaining Enjoyment; and even wholly destroy the Taste for Pleasure; if it should slacken a Man's Activity break his Spirits and impair his Health; nay, if in the Tumult of his Soul, it should cause him to entertain hard Thoughts of God, and to speak unadvisedly of his Proceedings.

And it might be feared, that his *Sorrow* would be as lasting as the Transports of it were violent. Nature indeed provides a Balm for the Wounds occasioned by the Death of our Friends. And it is for the most Part ordained by the good Author of our Frame, that nothing which is violent should be permanent; that Time and Absence should abate the Swell of the most tempestuous Passions; and the Affection that endeared to us our Friends, will diminish after that the Object has been for some Time withdrawn. But we often observe this Remedy to be slow in its Operations, tedious Days, and Months, and Years of Anguish intervene, and irreparable Mischief is sometimes done to the Spirits and Constitution, before it takes Effect. Yet they who had no Christian Hope, had no other Remedy, than to endure the Smart, till Time with its
slow

flow Hand, brought them Succour and Relief.

Now the Apostle was concerned, that his Friends might not lie long in such a Deluge of Distress. I would not have you ignorant, Brethren, concerning them which are asleep, *that you sorrow not even as others which have no Hope.*

You see, he does not forbid their *sorrowing at all* ; only he would not have them to *sorrow as those who have no Hope* : and indeed it were very unnatural to suppose that every Degree of Grief on such Occasions is unlawful. The Christians at *Thessalonica*, were probably, only a small Number, and the Death of a few, might be a great Breach upon them ; or, as the Affliction seems to have made a general and deep Impression upon their Minds, it is possible they had lost some Persons of Eminence, and of distinguished Usefulness. Now if this was the Case, it had been unreasonable, it had been ungenerous, nay, it had been requiring an Impossibility, to insist that they should not sorrow at all : And we may easily imagine a Variety of Circumstances, which will vindicate our Mourning, provided we mourn not as those who have no Hope.

Can

Can it be unlawful to mourn, when we behold a Fellow Creature, a Neighbour, an Acquaintance cut down by a sudden and irresistible Stroke ; struggling under the Anguish of acute Diseases, fainting under the Oppression and Languor of Nature, or expiring in strong Convulsions ; the agreeable Form we have so often beheld with Delight, marred with deep Furrows the regular Set of Features distorted, the comely Countenance exchanged for a black and meagre Visage ; the active, vigorous Limb without Sense and Motion,—must we take a long Farewel of those, with whom we have took sweet Counsel, and see triumphant Death with horrid Strides, conveying them to the Grave, to leave them there as a Prey to Worms and Putrefaction.—Must we do this, I say, without Regret and Lamentation ?

Must we not grieve, when we lose Persons of eminent Worth and Usefulness ; who were indued with large Talents for doing good ? Persons of natural Sagacity, who had an easy Command of their Passions, and a solid Judgment, improved by long Experience ? who having made just Observations upon Mankind, and remarked the various Course and Events of Life with Attention,
were

were capable of ordering their own Affairs with Discretion, and advising their Friends in the most intricate Junctures with a kind of oracular Wisdom? May we not grieve if such are removed, when in the Course of Nature we might hope the ^{Continuance} ~~Council~~ of their Aid and Coun^{sel}~~seance~~ for many succeeding Years; when their Knowledge and Experience were in full Maturity, and their bodily Strength and Vigor had discovered no Declension.

Shall not *they mourn* who had the Happiness of a particular Acquaintance, with Persons of such honourable and useful Characters? Who were admitted to peculiar Intimacy and Confidence? Who through a Course of Years found them to be prudent, faithful and steady in their social Connections; ever ready to attend to the Case of their Friends, and make it their own; and though cautious in Undertaking, resolute and indefatigable in Executing, so as never to disappoint where any Engagement had been entered into, or Expectation encouraged?

It was alledged against the *Israelites* as a Crime, ^b *the Righteous perish, and no Man layeth it to Heart*; and can it be criminal to grieve ^c *when the godly Man ceaseth, when the*
Faith-

^b Is. lvii. 1. ^c Psal. xii. 1.

Faithful fail from among the Children of Men?

When Persons of real Goodness, and of eminent religious Attainments? Who had Piety without Superstition, and Devotion free from Enthusiasm: Who had a rational Regard for divine Revelation, and were zealous to promote and secure its peculiar Honours, without a mean Attachment to party Names, or Disposition to censure on Account of lesser Differences: Persons who discovered a cordial Esteem for all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, in Sincerity, however denominated or distinguished: Who were remarkable for their Love to public Ordinances, and devout Retirement, and who witnessed the Truth and Sincerity of their Profession by a conscientious and humble Walk with God, and the exemplary Discharge of personal and relative Duties? I say when such are removed, can it be a Crime that we weep for ourselves and our Children!

We are required to ^a *remember those who have had the Rule over us, who have spoken to us the Word of God.* And can we remember them, and refrain from Mourning? Can it be unbecoming a Christian Society, to lament the Loss of those whose ministerial Labours,

^a Heb. xiii. 7.

bours, and pastoral Inspection they had once enjoyed? Who had faithfully explained, and warmly recommended the Duties of Religion, and affectionately opened the Springs of divine Consolation to trembling Converts, or feeble-minded Christians? Who had been the Instruments of instructing and converting some, of strengthening and animating others in the good Ways of God; of exciting and assisting their Devotions, and raising them almost to an heavenly Ardor by an uncommon Fervor of Spirit, and Copiousness and Propriety of Expression? Can they, who have been thus instructed and delighted forbear to mourn, nay, is it not their Duty to wail and lament such a Loss with a proportionable Degree of Sorrow?

Must not any Society lament the Loss of an honourable and worthy Member? Shall it not drop a Tear over the Grave of a Person of a candid, catholic and peaceable Disposition; who studied to avoid every Occasion of giving, or taking Offence; whose Prudence gave Wisdom, whose Steadiness gave Firmness, whose Reputation gave Credit, and whose ready and zealous Concurrence gave Vigor to all their Measures for the public Good?

E

Shall

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E

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Shall we behold without Sympathy the heart felt Pangs of their nearest Relatives? See their Families rent asunder by a sudden and surprising Stroke? Behold the Ornaments, the Pillars of their Houses torn down; the closest and most endeared Union dissolved, while those who survive have only the sad Remembrance left, that they once were amongst the happiest Families?

Has the affectionate and dutiful Child been bereaved of the tenderest Parent? The faithful Guide and Monitor of its inexperienced Youth, who laboured to store the Mind with Sentiments of Wisdom and Piety, and watched all its Motions with the most friendly Care; who sympathized in all its Afflictions, whose Heart exulted in all its Joys, and in beholding and augmenting its Sources of Happiness?—And shall not such a Loss be lamented?

Shall not the faithful Consort bewail in secret, when bereaved of a most affectionate Partner, a Pattern of conjugal Affection? Who not content with avoiding all Occasions of Grieving, was studious to lessen every Care and Fatigue; and to increase and heighten every Enjoyment, who naturally and tenderly took part in every Affliction,
and

and was solicitous to prevent Anxiety by encouraging a chearful Confidence? Shall the Diffolution of such a close and intimate Union of Hearts, a Friendship which had been mutual, and increasing through a considerable Number of Years not be attended with Sorrow? May it not be allowed her to mourn, who finds herself left to pursue and finish the Journey of Life alone, and to struggle with the Tempests of Adversity in the broken Bark of a delicate, infeebled Constitution? Who has been surpris'd into these Circumstances; when amidst all the Vicissitudes of Life, so fatal a Reverse was scarce suspected? Who, when a Separation was thought of, (and what prudent Person, who lives in such a dying World, would not often think of a Separation) hoped, and had some plausible Grounds to hope she should have been first dismissed to her Rest; and 'till then have been sustained by the same friendly Hand which had so long ministered to her in every Stage, both of Action and Adversity, and when human Help failed, had called in that which is divine, by his daily and most importunate Prayers.

What Eye can refrain from Tears, under such a Pressure, what Heart is not ready to

bleed? Can that be criminal, which is so natural and unavoidable? If we have any Tenderness, any Delicacy, if we have any of the just Feelings of Humanity, we cannot be unmoved. It were as easy to become insensible of Pain from a broken Bone, or a mangled Limb, as to be wholly unaffected in such Circumstances. Sorrow springs from the very Frame of our Natures. And indeed the Affections from whence it necessarily flows are wisely and kindly wrought into our Constitution, by the Author of our Frame. How tasteless were Life without soft and social Affections! Yet that very Disposition which incites us to all the Offices of Friendship, which gives us Delight in our Friends, and makes us Partakers of their Happiness, must fill us with Distress when they are afflicted or removed, unless it were instantaneously to decay and perish with our Friends, and a Miracle were wrought to destroy it. Yea, there is a Comeliness, there is a great Dignity in Sorrow on special Occasions. *Jesus wept* at the Grave of his Friend *Lazarus*. Nay I will add there is a *Pleasure* in it too. Who would wish to be separated from his Friends, and feel no Pain in the Act of Separation? Who would wish
to

to have a Soul devoid of Tendernefs, and incapable of being melted in Sympathy ? If we are paff feeling, we fhould be incapable of profiting by fuch Dispensations. Were we inaccessible to Sorrow we fhould feem to ** defpife the Chaftening of the Lord*; a much worfe Extreme than *to faint when we are rebuked of him*.

The very Conftitution of our Natures then, Benevolence, Virtue, Religion; all I fay warrant and call upon us to mourn on fuch an Occafion as I have now reprefented; and fuch you know is that I am this Day affifting you to improve. We muft mourn and fmart under fuch a Stroke of divine Providence. But fhall we—fhall even thofe of us who are moft intimately concerned, abandon ourfelves to Grief or Defpair?—Shall we fet no Bounds to its Heighth and Continuance? Shall we fuffer it to grow into habitual fadnefs of Heart, and never admit a chearful Thought, 'till it has preyed on our Spirits, and deftroyed our Health? Shall it prevent our Complacency in furviving Friends, or our Communion with God, or our Thankfulnefs for all the Comforts which are continued? God forbid!—This were to
sorrow

* Heb. xii. 5.

sorrow as those who have no Hope; the Extreme against which the Apostle cautions us; which the Christian Hope should effectually prevent; and it is presumed the Thoughts already suggested may have a powerful Tendency to this Purpose.

Our Friends have left us: We shall converse with them, and consult them no more: Their *Countenance is changed and he has sent them away*.—But shall we give them up for lost? Do we expect to see them and to hear of them no more?—By no means. They are only withdrawn as it were into the Chambers of the Grave to *sleep*; laid down for a Season fatigued with the Burthens and Afflictions of Life; and released from any further Conflict. They have forgot their Toils and Sorrow; are quite free from all Complaints and Enemies; have no Part in the Cares and Tryals, with which we are struggling. They have gained compleat Liberty and Victory. No Alarms disturb them, no Pain, no Grief, no Fear, no Sin, no Temptation; nothing assaults them which can minister Terror or Apprehension. He spake well, and tho' not by Inspiration, yet perfectly agreeable to it, who said, ^a“ The Souls
“ of the Righteous are in the Hands of God,
and

^a Wis. iii, 1, &c.

“ and there shall no Torment touch them.
 “ In the Sight of the Unwise they seemed to
 “ die, their Departure is taken for Misery,
 “ and their going from us to be utter De-
 “ struction; but they are in Peace; though
 “ they be punished in the Sight of Men,
 “ yet is their Hope full of Immortality;
 “ and having been a little chastened, they
 “ shall be greatly rewarded.”

They sleep in Jesus. He, their Lord, their
 Friend, their Fore-runner and Commander,
 and ours, appointed their Removal. To us,
 it was an affecting Order, it was a Season of
 deadly Alarm and Consternation;—it was
 swift and sudden;—there was a Croud of
 Circumstances which a mournful Survivor can
 recollect to imbitter that Day's Remembrance.
 But they were such as he chose, whose Wis-
 dom and Kindness cannot be suspected. ^a *Je-
 sus is Lord over all Things to the Church; in
 him are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and
 Knowledge; to him we have committed our
 Friends and ourselves, our Souls and all our
 most important Interests; and can we enter-
 tain a Thought that he has acted unjustly or
 unkindly? that he has erred in Regard to
 the Event itself, or the Season or Manner*
 of

^a Eph. i. 22. Col. xi. 3.

of its Accomplishment. It is impossible. As they sleep at his Command, they sleep as it were in his Arms, and recline on his Bosom. Their Relation to him still subsists, though that between us and them is broken. ^a *He is Lord of the Dead, as well as of the Living.* Their Souls are in a Province of his universal Empire, and safe under his sovereign Power, and he has a tender Regard even for their lifeless Clay; he watches over it in all the Changes through which it passes, and no Place to which it can be scattered, is beyond his Reach and Jurisdiction; and he will, one Day, collect these scattered Atoms, and form them into a glorious Body. Yes, Sirs, ^b *his Energy is able to subdue all Things unto himself*; and it shall effect this. Sickness marring our Beauty; Death triumphing as in our utter Destruction, and the Grave greedily swallows up and incloses its Prey. But is the Tyrant's Reign perpetual? No. He whose Word is infallible, and whose Power is uncontroulable, has declared, *O Death I will be thy Plague. O Grave I will be thy Destruction; Repentance shall be hid from mine Eyes.* Those very Bodies we have committed to Dust shall rise with inconceivably greater Comeliness and Vigor, than they

^a Rom. xiv. 9.^b Phil. iii. 21.

they ever before possessed. ^a *This corruptible shall put on Incorruption, this Mortal shall put on Immortality; now when this Corruptible shall have put on Incorruption, and this Mortal shall have put on Immortality, it may well be said, "Death is swallowed up of Victory"; and the Thoughts of it should in a great Measure dry up our Tears and assuage our Anguish on Account of the present melancholy Alteration, since it shall so soon be reversed with such glorious Advantage.*

In the mean Time, their *separate Spirits* which they so often, so solemnly and so affectionately committed to his Care, are happy in his Presence. *They are departed and are with Christ, which is far better; better than in the happiest Circumstances in which we ever knew them. And shall we regret their Exaltation? Can we be selfish enough to wish the Possession of this Happiness had for our Sakes been longer delayed? that they had been for a Time debarred from the sacred Transport of beholding, admiring, worshipping and enjoying God among the Spirits of just Men made perfect? Can we regret that they are arrived before us at the heavenly Mansions, and are already possessed of*

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that

^a 1 Cor. xv. 53, &c.

that which we are praying and longing for, and shall never be happy till we enjoy?

And yet is not this the Case? Is it not the Object of our pleasing Hope and Expectation, and of our warmest Desire, that we may arrive where they are? Do we not ardently long to join the glorious Assembly and Church of the First-born, promising ourselves the noblest Entertainment from conversing with all the Servants of God, who ^a*serve him, and see his Face, and whose Name is in their Foreheads*. And do we not believe, that our pious Friends, who with Respect to us are asleep, are incorporated into this blessed Society? are conversing with *Abraham*, and *Isaac*, and *Jacob*; with *Moses*, *David*, and the Prophets; with the great Apostles *Paul* and *Peter*, *James* and *John*, by whose Writings they were so much instructed and delighted while here below; with all the other Apostles, the Martyrs and Confessors for Christ, and with those Christians in all their successive Generations, who have overcome by the Blood of the Lamb and are safely arrived in those happy Regions, with all their dear Relatives and Friends first removed, with whom they had formerly taken
sweet

sweet Counsel, and who had been mutual Helpers of each other's Faith and Joy?

It seems from this Epistle, that St. *Paul* expected to meet his Friends in the other World, and to know them again, and that the Service he had done them would be remembered: *what is our Joy, or Crown of Rejoicing? are not even ye in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his Coming?* To bid a final Adieu to our Friends for ever;—to think of their being separated from us, never to meet together any more, is a Thought sufficient to overwhelm a tender and affectionate Heart. But are we not aspiring and ascending to that Country, at which they are already arrived? And what Vigour, and what Pleasure should it inspire, to think that our Friends have safely reached the Haven of Rest, and wait to welcome and congratulate our Arrival! When we consider, how short lived and precarious all earthly Friendships are, and with what mortifying and distressing Aggravations they are often broken, it would almost discourage us from forming or cherishing them; and the more intimate and delightful they have been, the more acute and afflictive is the Dissolution. But Friendships founded

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in

in Religion, shall survive the Stroke of Death; such kindred Souls shall unite again in closer and happier Bonds, and the Union subsist through eternal Ages, without the Fear of a Separation; when there will be no Afflictions to awaken Sympathy, nor Infirmities to move our Pity, no Errors or Imperfections to call for our Forbearance; no second Death to put a Period to our Happiness.

And there they see God; ^a *They behold his Face in Righteousness.* This is the Essence of the heavenly Felicity, *They are with the Lord*; with him in such a Sense, and in so high an Extacy of Delight as surpasses all Utterance or Conception. They are with him as their Friend and Father; they are with him, whose loving ^b *Kindness is better than Life*; whose Presence constitutes the Felicity of Angels; with that Saviour, ^c *whom having not seen they loved; and in whom, even when they saw him not, they believed, and rejoiced with Joy unspeakable, and full of Glory.* They experience the full Accomplishment of those delightful Words, which till now they could never compleatly comprehend; ^d *in thy Presence is FULLNESS OF JOY.*
And

^a Psal. xvii. 15.

^b Psal. lxiii. 3.

^c 1 Pet. i. 8.

^d Psal. xvi. 11.

And this they shall for ever feel and enjoy. They shall ever be with the Lord, ever behold his Glory, ever converse with the supreme Wisdom ; love and adore his matchless and boundless Perfections ; derive thro' Eternity, Wisdom and Knowledge, and Joy from his overflowing Fulness, till they themselves, according to the sublime Language of St. Paul, ^b *are filled with all the Fulness of God.*

They possess a Happiness which infinitely repays, nay, absolutely swallows up the Remembrance of all the Toil and Labour they have undergone ; all their Conflicts with Temptation, and internal Weakness and Corruption, their tedious Watchings and Wrestlings, and earnest Prayers.—A Happiness proportioned to all the wonderful Methods which God has taken by his Providence, Word and Spirit to prepare them for its Participation. Yea, they possess a Happiness worthy the Humiliation and Death of the Son of God ; for which he did not regret to leave the heavenly Mansions and expire on a Cross ; and in their Possession of which he acknowledges ^c *the Travail of his Soul to be fully satisfied.*

Such

^b Eph. iii. 19.

^c Is. liii. 11.

Such, yea infinitely more happy and glorious than any human Language can describe, is the State into which our pious Friends are entered. ^d *Wherefore comfort one another with these Words.*

Let us make these heart-reviving Truths familiar to our Minds; let us mingle them with the sad Train of tumultuous Thoughts that crowd into our Minds from a Variety of other Quarters; mingle them with the painful Reflexions that occur on the happy Years in which we have already enjoyed their Friendship, (Years that will return no more) and on the fatal Necessity to which we find ourselves reduced of passing the Residue of our Days without them.

Let us endeavour to impress these Truths on our Hearts, by the daily Exercise of a steady Faith: To conceive of them as Matters of undoubted Certainty, clearly revealed and established on the fullest Evidence. Let us try to realize them to our Minds, and to make the Conviction so deep that nothing may be able to deface it.

And may he ^e *that comforteth those who are cast down*, comfort us in our present Tribulation! May he strengthen our Faith in these
momen-

momentous Truths, and enable us to take to ourselves all the Consolation they are capable of affording!

Even this indeed may not entirely prevent our Mourning; but we shall *not sorrow as those who have no Hope*. Nature must be allowed to feel; and some Indulgence may be granted to the first Swell of the tender Affections. We may well mourn to think we are left to struggle with Difficulties and Afflictions alone, deprived of the Guidance and Counsel of those whom God used as Instruments, by which he administered those Supports, which were truly divine!—And we ought to sympathize with each other, and to mourn the Loss of the Friends of Mankind and Religion. But divine Faith in its more vigorous Effects, may incline us to *rejoice* on their Account, *because they are gone to the Father*. Bright and pleasing Ideas of this kind may sooth our Grief and assuage our Sorrows, while we are disposed to stand weeping at their Graves; and we should rejoice to think that they are safe and happy. Nay, tho' when looking at their Tombs, we do, as it were, behold the Tombs of all the dearest and tenderest Friends, we still enjoy, waiting to receive them; yea, though we
there

^f John xiv. 28.

there behold our own made ready for us, yet a lively Faith may teach us to think of the Approach of our own Dissolution, without any painful Emotion ; and in its nearest Prospect, if we are true Christians enable us with an Air of Satisfaction in our Countenances, and true Peace and Joy in our Hearts ; to break forth in the triumphant Language of the Apostle, *§ O Death, where is thy Sting ! O Grave, where is thy Victory ! Thanks be to God who giveth us the Victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen !*

§ 1 Cor. xv. 55, &c.



F I N I S.

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